

769
DEC 3 1940

TOWARD INDEPENDENCE

(This article appeared in the September 1940 issue of OPPORTUNITY, and in the November 1940 issue of SERVICE MAGAZINE. It is reprinted with the permission of both of these publications.)



Like the rest of the hundred-odd families who make up the Flint River Farms community in Macon County, Georgia, Joe Brown, his wife and his children are working out their own salvation. It is true that they have had Government help in security credit. Otherwise, industrious though they were, they would in all probability still be sharecropping. It is also true that the Browns, together with the other families, are receiving guidance from Government experts, but it is guidance in the best sense of the word. No one is doing their thinking for them; they are learning to think for themselves.

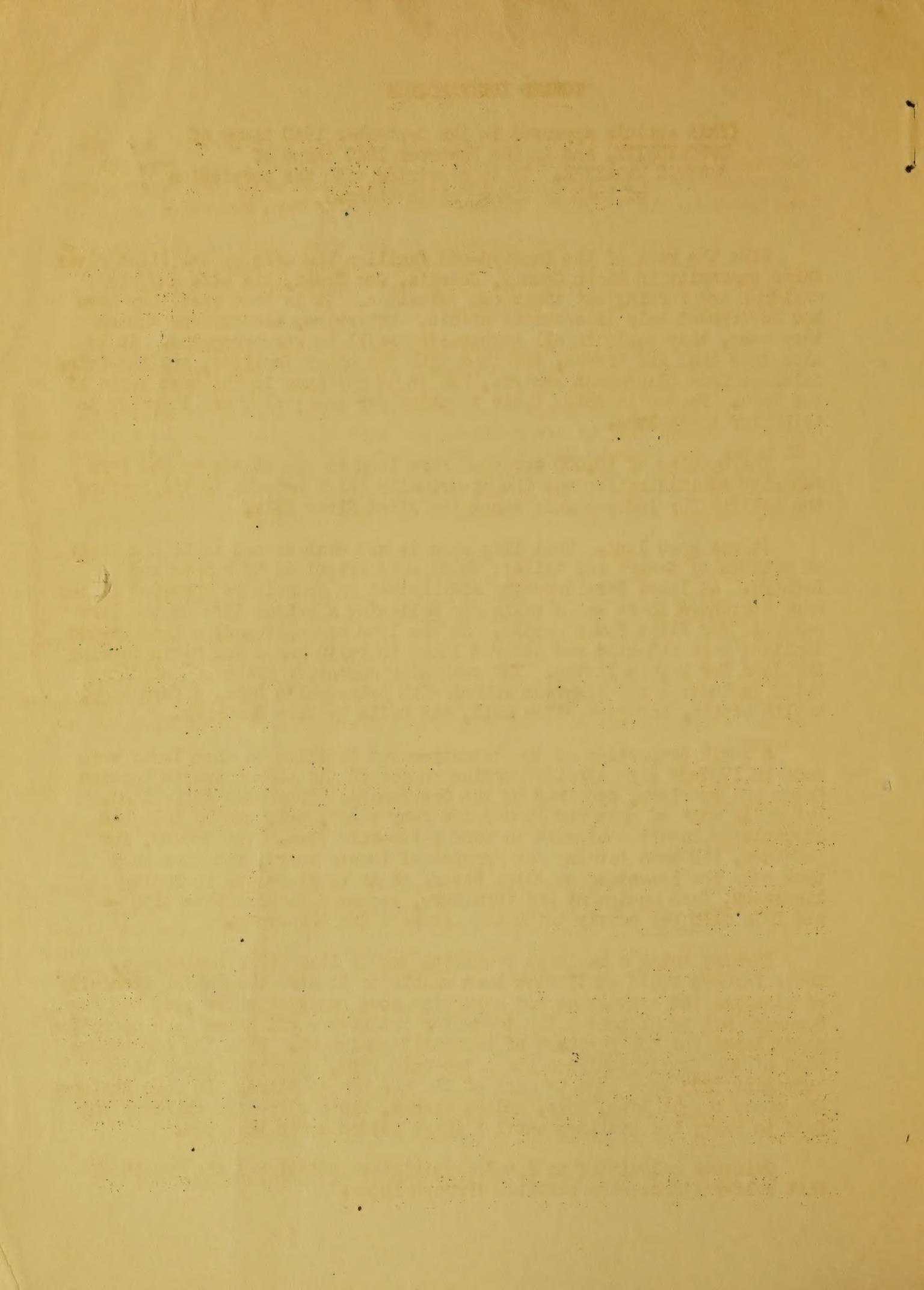
The opening of 10,000 acres of farm land as homesteads by the Farm Security Administration was the opportunity which brought to the surface the ability for independence among the Flint River folk.

It was good land. That life upon it was drab seemed to be the fault of methods of tenure and tillage which were practiced by owners and farmers. At least Farm Security Administration appraisers surveyed it and were convinced there was a basis for believing a better life on the farm possible for Flint River people. So the land was optioned; a hundred-odd families were selected and offered loans to build homes and begin farming the land for a good living. The community center, a group of buildings which includes a new six-room school with principal's home, a farm shop, health center, and recreation hall, was built by Farm Security.

A large proportion of the seventy-seven families to whom loans were made in 1937-38 were already working on one of the eleven tracts between Macon and Americus, acquired by the Government. They knew their land. But while most of them had farmed for many years, only one of them had accumulated enough equipment to work a two-mule farm. The Browns, for instance, had been farming for upwards of twenty years, yet when they took over the homestead at Flint River, their total assets including livestock, farm equipment and furniture, amounted to less than \$150 — and this \$150 was nearly twice the average for the group.

Farming being a business requiring credit like other businesses, these farmers would still have been unable to do more than think wishfully of planting and harvesting and marketing good crops of their own, had Farm Security not supplemented the loans for the houses and barns with operating goods loans for the purchase of essential equipment. With the one exception of the family equipped for a two-mule farm, operating goods loans averaging \$873 were made to each of the new homesteaders. In each instance the money bought cows, hogs, mules, wagons, clothes for the children and food to carry the families until a first garden could be grown.

Guidance calculated to develop initiative stimulated the growth of that self-reliance made possible through loans.



People trained in the agricultural colleges were brought into the community to lend technical advice to their neighbors. And from the beginning the homesteaders were encouraged to add their own suggestions and ideas to the technical guidance supplied by Farm Security.

So the experience and ingenuity of Joe Brown and his neighbors went into a general pool of information along with the results from years of research and experiment in the fields and laboratories of Government stations and agricultural colleges.

Thus the community manager's knowledge of markets points toward a new supplementary cash crop -- pimento peppers; the farm supervisor urges a livestock program (there are plenty of hogs fattening in the pens at Flint River); and Joe Brown finds that five acres planted in peas will produce enough cash to carry him to the next crop year without an additional loan. Joe Brown's boy, Bob, wants some cash of his own, so he raises an acre of good corn for himself and gets the cash. No one is forced to plant the pimentoes or raise the hogs or bother with the supplementary crop. Common sense and the desire to get ahead supply the incentive.

Further incentive comes from the school. When farm operations first began at Flint River in 1938, a vocational teacher was employed in the nearby town of Montezuma. Farm Security personnel — community manager, farm supervisor and home economist — cooperated with this teacher immediately in establishing evening classes that are still conducted regularly at the community center. Evening classes for boys and adults are conducted by vocational teachers provided by the State. Work in these classes, as in the community school, stems from the interests and activities of the coastal plain area and more particularly from the interests of the community.

Group meetings where canning is done in the new pressure cookers, rugs are hooked and braided, and budget-making is explained, carry on the educational process that is a major part of Farm Security Administration procedure.

These group contacts have developed the spirit that is the difference between real estate developments and communities. Health has become a matter of community concern with farming improving as treatment for hook-worm, malaria, and venereal disease progresses. Clean homes are the order of the day. Flint River pride is keeping pace with Flint River progress.

Where the man farthest down does his daily stint in industry or in the field without loudly protesting his lot, there has been a tendency on the part of social psychologists to mistake his inarticulateness for apathy, to be disturbed by his apparent lack of "divine discontent," to suggest hopeless human material. One of the indications that such an interpretation is wrong far oftener than it is right lies in the response to each opportunity for progress and development made by people like these farmers at Flint River. Less than a baker's dozen of them had advanced as far as "third and fourth" renting before the new community was

begun. Most of them had been day-laborers and sharecroppers operating land they could not hope to own -- or even to control. Now they are demonstrating ability to manage better farms than they were directed to plow in previous years.

On the first of January, 1938, when farm experts and families sat down to plan the first year's operations, the approximate net worth of each family was \$78. One year later a variety of cash crops with plenty of hay and grain for the stock and ample gardens to provide balanced diets the year round, had raised the amount to \$300 per family net after deducting all indebtedness including Government loans. Although starting late, the seventy-seven families had raised and sold 200 tons of peanuts, 475 bales of cotton, canned 28,000 quarts of fruits and vegetables (an average of 363 quarts per family), and stored potatoes and syrup, dried peas, butter beans, and dried fruits for winter use. When twenty-five new families joined the community too late to plant feed, the old families had sufficient surplus to sell them all they needed. Eighty percent of all families produced enough pork and lard the first year to carry them through to the next killing season.

If Joe Brown or any of the other homesteaders have a real worry, it probably lies in the direction of the future of young Flint River -- where the boys and girls who grow to maturity in the community will find their chance. But this at least is sure: when Joe Brown's Bob and the other boy, Jim, step out, they will have behind them all the knowledge and experience gained from their years of work and association at Flint River. Their sisters will go into homes of their own, knowing what to do to make them effective as centers of farm life and interest. Communities like Flint River may be expected, in the course of years, to lend definite direction to the underestimated abilities of increasing numbers of farm workers looking for the way toward independence.

000000000

